

## **FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**Submitted by: Richard E. Adams, California State Parks Forester**

### **Finding: Increasing Risk of Catastrophic Fire**

The risk of wildfire in the Tahoe Basin is extreme and the probability of catastrophic fire occurrence is increasing.

### **Background and Supporting Evidence:**

The Lake Tahoe Basin is a fire-prone environment where frequent, low intensity fires played a critical ecological role, risk of summer fires is high to extreme every year, and every acre of native forest will eventually burn again. The natural fire regime of low elevation forests in the Lake Tahoe Basin was characterized by a 5 to 10 year fire return interval and very open stands of large trees as evidenced by studies of fire scars and historic photographs.

Due to the unprecedented absence of natural fire and its thinning and recycling effects, and the lack of proper forest management, the forests in the Lake Tahoe Basin are now composed of more trees, surface fuels, and overall biomass available to burn in wildfires than ever before. Under healthy forest conditions, native bark beetles play an important ecological role by killing stressed and weakened trees every year, but under current forest conditions in the Basin, they now kill trees in record numbers due to the dense forest structures in which most, if not all, trees are stressed and weakened by extreme tree to tree competition.

Of the three factors that affect wildland fire behavior (fuel, weather and topography) fuel is the only factor that we can manage.

### **Recommendation(s)**

1. The restoration of forests to a fire-resilient condition (that is, a forest that can mostly survive and thrive with recurring wildland fire) should be a common management goal of all public land management agencies, regulatory agencies, and private property owners in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

***(suggested modification):***

- 2. The Governors of California and Nevada should adopt the priorities of life, property, and the environment, in that order, with respect to fire safety, fire prevention, and such other matters within the jurisdiction of the commission.***
- 3. It is further recommended that the Governors of California and Nevada advise and recommend to TRPA and the various state agencies having jurisdiction over environmental matters within the Tahoe Basin, that these priorities should be incorporated in the order set forth above to the maximum extent possible in the standards and procedures applied by such agencies within the Basin.***

**Impacts of Implementation:** *(The implementation of any Recommendation is likely to have specific impacts. Consider potential consequences related to each of the following areas):*

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is REQUIRED (Best Estimate):

- ☐ Cost The cost of fire suppression in forests not treated for fuels reduction is greater than the cost of implementing the fuels reduction treatments. Fuels reduction treatments will protect our forests for benefits of future generations.
- ☐ Funding source Funding sources will have to come from Federal, State, Local and Private to adequately restore and protect the forests of the Lake Tahoe Basin.
- ☐ Staffing Staffing must be qualified, trained and increased to properly address the work load of forest restoration.
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws Existing regulations and laws must be streamlined to improve efficiency of implementing forest fuels reduction projects.

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is OPTIONAL:

- ☐ Operational
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Health and Safety
- ☐ Environmental
- ☐ Interagency